

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for tracking use of an ultrasound probe, said method comprising:

storing tracking information within an ultrasound probe; and

accessing the stored tracking information within the ultrasound probe.

2. A method in accordance with claim 1 further comprising:

updating the tracking information based on use of the ultrasound probe; and

storing the updated tracking information within the ultrasound probe.

3. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises duration of use information.

4. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises duration of use information, the duration of use information including at least one of continuous use information, individual scan session use information, duration of time between scans information and usage pattern information.

5. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises mode of operation information.

6. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises probe temperature information.

7. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing is performed upon powering off the ultrasound probe.

8. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing is performed periodically.

9. A method in accordance with claim 1 further comprising storing the tracking information within an ultrasound system in connection with the ultrasound probe.

10. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to a memory within the ultrasound probe.

11. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to a predetermined address location within a memory within the ultrasound probe.

12. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the ultrasound probe comprises a non-volatile reprogrammable memory and wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to the non-volatile reprogrammable memory.

13. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the accessing is performed upon the ultrasound probe being connected to an ultrasound system.

14. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the accessing further comprises accessing probe identification information stored within the ultrasound probe.

15. A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising storing the updated tracking information within an ultrasound system connected to the ultrasound probe.

16. A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising determining a use time period of the ultrasound probe for updating the tracking information based upon a time period when the ultrasound probe is powered on.

17. A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising determining a use time period of the ultrasound probe for updating the tracking information based upon a time period when the ultrasound probe is scanning.

18. A method in accordance with claim 2 wherein the updated tracking information comprises cumulative tracking information and current use information.

19. A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises prior probe use information.

20. A method for tracking use of an ultrasound probe, said method comprising:

determining when an ultrasound probe is connected to an ultrasound system;

accessing probe scan time information and probe identification information stored within the ultrasound probe when a determination is made that the ultrasound probe is connected to the ultrasound system;

storing the accessed probe scan time information and probe identification information within the ultrasound system;

measuring a current scan time for the ultrasound probe;

updating the scan time information with the current scan time; and

storing the updated scan time information within the ultrasound probe.

21. A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the storing of the updated scan time information is performed upon one of powering off the ultrasound probe and ending an ultrasound scan.

22. A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the storing of the updated scan time information is performed periodically during a current scan and further comprising storing the updated scan time information within the ultrasound system.

23. A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the information is accessed from and stored to a non-volatile reprogrammable memory within the ultrasound probe.

24. An ultrasound system comprising: /

an ultrasound scanner; and

an ultrasound probe removably connectable to the ultrasound scanner, the ultrasound probe having a memory for storing tracking information.

25. An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the memory is configured to be accessed by the ultrasound scanner.

26. An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the ultrasound scanner comprises a probe interface for reading information from and writing information to the memory within the ultrasound probe.

27. An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the tracking information comprises at least one of duration of use information, usage pattern information, mode of operation information, temperature information and temperature power off information.